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ABSTRACT

The characterizations of women in three of Federico Fellini's films can be used to demonstrate the process of self-actualization real women experience during the fulfillment of the promises of the women's liberation movement. The films "La Dolce Vita" and "8 1/2" portray traditional stereotypes of women with traditional societal roles. However, in "Juliet of the Spirits" Fellini creates a female character with full personality dimensions. A progression of gradual liberation of the female characters can be traced from "La Dolca Vita" through 8 1/2" to "Juliet of the Spirits." Also, there is a parallel between the personal growth of the female characters and the journey of Dante through his "Commedia." An understanding of feminism can be gained through the study of films and literature. (CH)

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THE JOURNEY TOWARD LIBERATION FOR FELLINI'S WOMAN

One critic has described Federico Fellini's film Juliet of the Spirits as a "female counterpart of Fellini's previous film, 8 ½, adding that there was now a "Hers to hang next to His," with the parallels between the two films "obviously intended to be obvious."[1] But there were also important parallels between 8 ½ and the film which preceded it, La Dolce Vita. Juliet of the Spirits can, in fact, be seen as Part III of a Dantean trilogy.[2] Fellini's representation of himself, like Dante's, is first seen in the hell of a contemporary city. Engaged in pursuit of gossip for his tabloid and of a sex-goddess for himself, Marcello of La Dolce Vita seems to abandon hope of finding a meaningful message to write or a meaningful religion to believe in. Then with a change in name and an advancement in age and vocation, essentially the same character appears in 8 ½ on a purgatorial journey. Now named Guido (but still played by Marcello Mastroianni),[3] the filmmaker hero of 8 ½ travels primarily through the internal space of his mind, moving backward and forward in time as he tries to make a film about his life, while incidentally but symbolically partaking of the purgative waters of a health

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[1]Stanley Kauffmann, "8 ½--Ladies' Size," New Republic, November 13, 1965, p. 28.

[2]See Lessie M. Reynolds, "An Analysis of the Non-Verbal Symbolism in Federico Fellini's Film Trilogy: La Dolce Vita, 8 ½, and Juliet of the Spirits," Diss. University of Michigan, 1969. Summaries of the films are contained in the appendices.

Prints of the films are available as follows: La Dolce Vita, Audio Film Center, Inc., Mount Vernon, N. Y.; 8 ½, Embassy Pictures Corp., Atlanta, Georgia; Juliet of the Spirits, Rizzoli Film Distributors, Inc., New York.

[3]Fellini often uses actors' real names, as he did for Marcello in La Dolce Vita. The name Guido, however, in 8 ½ may allude to the Guido of Dante's Purgatory, XXVI, who, like Fellini's character, was cleansing his soul of lust.

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spa. Through his film art, Guido is able to bring harmony to the discordant elements of his real life, and thus he reaches the goal of a purgatory. Then in Juliet of the Spirits, and through an even more psychic journey, a female protagonist also achieves redemption by traveling through spheres of the spirit world to reach a perception of an existentialist paradise. As did Dante in Paradiso, Juliet journeys toward her paradise through intervening spheres, where she, like Dante, encounters transubstantiated spirits, and through them she learns the nature of modern woman's heaven--liberation from myths about herself.

More important, perhaps, than the Dantean archetypal journey which unites these three films is Fellini's apparent departure from the Dantean model in presenting his third film from a woman's point of view.

One explanation for Fellini's shift to a woman as protagonist may lie in his wish to explore various facets of modern humanity's myths, expecially those about women. In the two films prior to Juliet of the Spirits, Fellini had focused on the opposing potentials of archetypal views of women. When the archetypes are distorted and vulgarized, as they often are by media, they inevitably contribute to the bitterness of the "sweet life." The archetypes of Woman as Jungian Anima,[4] moreover, can be a source of torment when

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[4]Fellini exhibits strong influence of Jung's thought in Tullio Kezich, "The Long Interview," trans. Howard Greenfeld; transcription of the final screenplay by John Cohen, trans. Cecilia Perrault (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1966), p. 46.

Deena Boyer, The Two Hundred Days of 8 ½, trans. Charles Lam Markham (New York: Macmillan Co., 1964), p. 205, does not discuss the Jungian use of the term anima, but its importance as Italian for "soul" is stressed in the term's interesting use in 8 ½: "Asanisimasa," the magic incantation used in that film, was considered for the film's title, with the incantation decipherable as "anima" when every second syllable is removed.

they cause a man to hold dualistic attitudes toward women. Fellini shows such Jungian archetypes most frequently in his representations of the Earth Mother, the Temptress, and the Platonic-Christian Ideal. He adds a fourth by reversing the archetype of Unfaithful Wife to show the Fellinian man's Too-Faithful Wife-Mother. The Earth Mother, whom Fellini's hero strongly desires because of childhood memories, and the Temptress sometimes merge, but both are forbidden to him by his Catholic religion. His religious training also places the Ideal, or Madonna, out of reach sexually, although it is her type he seeks for his bride. The woman to whom he is married, however, becomes a forbidding figure, an oppressively faithful servant-wife who is typically identified with his elderly, reproachful mother. The film 8 ½ shows the hero as creative artist, struggling with his dualistic views of women--as either too good or too old to be sexually desirable, or too desirable to be virtuous. At one point in the film, Fellini amusingly satirizes his hero's dilemma by showing his fantasy of a harem in the farmhouse of his childhood, where all the women of his imagination serve his comfort and vanity. The film artist hero of 8 ½, however, finally understands the necessity of drawing from, and merging, all the archetypes of Woman which he holds in his creative unconscious. The final sequence of 8 ½ thus shows a dance of life around a circus ring and significantly joins, hand in hand, all of the hero's women--except the imaginary Ideal who seems replaced by his wife as the leader of the dance.[5]

It could be argued that Fellini's use of Juliet as protagonist in his subsequent film is simply a means of representing his hero's newly discovered ideal Anima, best represented in the person of his wife. Since Fellini's

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[5]A previous version of 8 ½'s ending with all the characters together on a train, rather than around a circus ring, apparently did not include the Ideal either. Compare photographs of Claudia, the Ideal, with the still photograph of the alternate train sequence in Boyer, pp. 130-131.

hero had always been essentially Fellini himself,[6] Juliet can be seen as a representation of the female side of Fellini, especially considering that his wife, Giulietta Masina, plays the role of Juliet. And it could be further argued that Fellini again follows in the footsteps of Dante by allowing himself to see paradise only through the eyes of his Beatrice.

Perhaps the most important explanation for Fellini's use of Juliet as protagonist in the third film of his trilogy, however, can be found by remembering that Fellini's major theme concerns communication, and that he explores its various facets. He presents moderns as so facile in the technology of communication that they are almost overwhelmed by their facility. Fellini shows, then, three major ways of considering the effects of the communication overload. First, La Dolce Vita shows excommunicated modern man in his symbolic role of passive reporter; without any meaningful message of his own, he is involved in distortions and lies as purveyor of modern myths of gods and goddesses of the media. Second, 8 ½ shows the man of the media, though still frustrated, as active, creative artist who finds he can exercise his imaginative powers to transcend and transform the myths which define him and the women in his life. Third, Juliet of the Spirits shows the effects of media, and its attendant romantic distortions, upon the passive, receiving audience; use of a child-woman as protagonist is Fellini's way of symbolizing such an audience. Juliet is married, it should also be noted, to a public relations man, another of Fellini's communications experts. As a typically bourgeois housewife, Juliet has no real life of her own and is, therefore, particularly susceptible to the romantic myths brought to her by

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[6] Renzo Renzi, in a collection of interviews, Federico Fellini, Premier Plan, No. 12 (Bologne: Capelli, 1960), p. 40, quotes Fellini concerning La Dolce Vita: "Oui, une autobiographie. Marcello c'est moi. ..." For parallels between Fellini's life and 8 ½, see Boyer.

her continually turned-on television set. Thus, in many ways Juliet is the most deceived of Fellini's trilogy protagonists. It is, accordingly, all the more important to detail her problems in the journey toward liberation.

Juliet's childlike role as gullible audience shows her to be a complete believer--not only in myths, but also in magic. Thus she is the receptive participant in a seance which takes place early in the film. In this and subsequent sequences, it is impossible to tell whether or not the released spirits who visit Juliet are hallucinations. In any case, they fuse in her mind with the almost equally unreal glamor figures with whom she comes in contact through her husband's job. Both his associates and the emanations from the spirit world seem no more (and no less) real to her than the sounds and sights emanating from her television set. All speak to Juliet of the romantic love missing in her life.

Indeed, the childless Juliet is surrounded by signs of love's fruition: her maid has a lover, her married sister has twins and is pregnant, and even Juliet's cat is pregnant.[7] But because Juliet is unloved, she, who seems to have expected marriage to bring a fairy-tale "happy ever after" life, is as lost as an Alice in the mad Wonderland of her husband's vocation.[8] For Juliet, though a middle-aged woman, is the most childlike of Fellini's three childlike protagonists. In fact, Juliet's central problem is that she is bound by childish conceptions of good and evil which (unlike those finally harmonized by Guido in 8 ½) are shown as repressive forces from which she

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[7]Renata Adler, "Fellini Casts a Color Spell," Life, November 26, 1965, p. 18, makes a similar point.

[8]Kezich, p. 45, quotes Fellini as saying that he suggested to his designer that the costumes should evoke a "childlike tone, also a disquieting one, like Alice in Wonderland."

must be free in order to be whole. Her unconscious contains spirits which must be exorcised.

Juliet's journey toward freedom is perhaps more like an LSD "trip" than a real journey through space (as in La Dolce Vita) or through time (as in 8 ½).[9] And just as the spa setting narrowed the journey of 8 ½, so the journey of Juliet is further narrowed to her house and its environs. She leaves what she apparently considers her "place" at home infrequently. The beach which she visits is only a short walk from her house, as is the studio of the sculptress who shocks Juliet with her male nudes. Even visible from Juliet's house is the exotic (and erotic) household of her apparently alter ego, Susy, who presents Juliet with only a momentary temptation to lead a different sort of life, that is, an immoral one in Juliet's terms. Only at the insistence of others, and only in attempts to keep her home the meaningful center of her life, does Juliet make three more distant visits: (1) to the hotel suite of the Bhisma, a mystic seer; (2) to the office of the detective investigating her husband's extramarital affair; and (3) to the home of her rival. By narrowing the locale of this film primarily to Juliet's house, Fellini has not only emphasized her empty role as housewife, but he has also narrowed the concern of the film more surely to Juliet's inner life. Even Guido's problems in 8 ½ very much involved those around him, although he found the resolution to his problems within himself. Juliet's problems, however, are largely due to her own image of herself, an image distorted by the mirror of her imagination.[10]

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[9]In Kezich, p. 31, Fellini refers to an LSD experiment which he undertook, with the supervision of a scientist friend, prior to filming Juliet of the Spirits.

[10]Mirrors are used at the opening of the film and frequently thereafter, perhaps to stress the ambiguity of reality or perhaps to symbolize Juliet's search for her true identity.

Juliet's imagination is, moreover, remarkably like her television set: nearly always turned on and particularly receptive to romantic distortions. More than any other of Fellini's characters, Juliet seems to believe in fairy-tale versions of herself and others, including even a fairy-tale conception of religion.

Since the film is seen largely through Juliet's point of view, the characters emerge with a closer identity to fairy tale archetypes than to the Jungian or Dantean ones of the preceding films. And in having Juliet ultimately reject her confusing guides from the spirit world, Fellini also differs from his Dantean model by suggesting that such guides can be misleading, especially when they are seen as saints. Throughout the film, Juliet painfully identifies with the role of saint which she played in a childhood drama.[11] Perhaps Juliet identifies with the martyred saint as compensation for being an Ugly Duckling in a family of beautiful women. In fact, Juliet's mother is presented in an early fantasy-memory with the false beauty of Walt Disney's Evil Stepmother in Snow White, in which aspect she reappears during the final episode of the film.[12] Juliet's subordinate role to this non-motherly woman and to her two, more imposing, sisters also suggests Juliet as Cinderella. It is as if she had been temporarily rescued by her Prince when she married. In a reversal of another fairy-tale, however, Juliet's Prince seems to have changed to a Beast, and with him she is in a no less subordinate and unloved position than she was with her mother and sisters. No real father appears

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[11] Kezich, p. 57, quotes Fellini as saying that the "gestation" period of Juliet of the Spirits extended back to the time of work on the film La Strada (also starring Giulietta Masina), during which period he had considered making a film about a "very sweet, unknown provincial saint," in an effort "to penetrate certain areas of reality which could find a perfect guide in Giulietta."

[12] Kezich, p. 235 (in the transcription of the final screen play by John Cohen, trans. Cecilia Perrault), similarly describes the mother.

in the film, and even Juliet's beloved grandfather (like the father in many fairy-tales) had gone away when Juliet was young, leaving her to the disdainful treatment of an unloving, stepmotherly mother.

Juliet's two memories of the grandfather's role in her childhood contain an important key to her problems. She remembers the liberation from martyrdom which he brought when she played the part of saint in the school play. He had literally stopped the show just as she was ascending on a martyr's rack to "heaven." Yet the child Juliet is remembered as weeping after his intervention, perhaps from disappointment at not having seen God as she had expected. Or perhaps she wept because of the shame the grandfather's actions brought to her mother and to the school's headmaster. Certainly the adult Juliet is shown still in fear of her mother's disapproval and of the vengeance of the kind of god which the headmaster represented. But Juliet also remembers her grandfather as an accomplice against the evil of her mother, or at least as a kindly and romantic figure--an elderly Prince who had eloped with a fairy Princess, represented by the ballerina to whom he had introduced Juliet when they had gone backstage in the fairy-tale world of the circus. On the other hand, Juliet also remembers the shock of her mother and of the headmaster when her grandfather and the ballerina eloped. It therefore seems that Juliet has two conflicting versions of her Father-God (both with long beards imposed by the childish view). There is one of vengeance like the headmaster, who requires martyrdom, and one of love like the grandfather, who nevertheless carries the threat of being really a tool of the devil. Consequently, the threat of the flames of hell is for Juliet the only alternative to the flames of martyrdom. (This attitude toward the only father figure Juliet has known undoubtedly influences her attitudes toward men in general.)

But her grandfather also appears as a kind of fairy godfather to Juliet, while his ballerina girl friend, Fanny, takes on the guise of a fairy godmother, especially as Juliet thinks that Iris, the spirit who speaks to Juliet during the seance, is perhaps really Fanny. Juliet's memory also identifies the ballerina with her hedonistic neighbor Susy (and the same actress plays the parts of Fanny, Iris, and Susy): Susy also behaves much like a voluptuous fairy godmother, offering her godson to Juliet as a lover. Juliet rejects this offer, just as she rejects the offers of help from all those around her. She perhaps realizes that their patronism is as spurious as their advice. Apparently only through the process of a psychodrama (which the viewer sees entirely through its manifestations in Juliet's mind) does a true diagnosis and prognosis for Juliet emerge. Significantly, even here Fellini has Juliet find her answers within herself--wherein her problems are located.

The psychodrama takes place during a garden party, where figures from Juliet's real and fantasy life are all seen in a montage of frightening shots. For example, there is a threatening Eve in the garden, wrapped in an enormous snake; gray-clad nuns from Juliet's school days march funereally among the guests, as Fascist soldiers goose-step; Susy appears, dressed in a mockery of Juliet's saint costume, and taunts Juliet with laughter and a bright red tongue. Juliet only partly emerges from her waking nightmare when the guests are leaving and she learns that her husband has also left. Juliet now knows that he is probably permanently leaving her for the other woman. Then, in a walk through the pine woods beside her house, with the psychodramatist, who has been the only person to remain after the party, Juliet finally seems able to accept advice. It may be important that this advice comes from a doctor who is also a woman. She tells Juliet "to become securely rooted"

like the lofty trees, but to spread branches out "in all directions"; "to fulfill [herself] . . . without conflict with [her] desires."[13] Perhaps this conversation accounts for Juliet's actions when the nightmarish figures reappear in a final flood of fantasy. She is able to dismiss all of her spirits, real or unreal, including the Susy-Fanny representations of licentious life as well as the Fascist soldier representations of Juliet's life with her husband. Most importantly, though, she dismisses her mother's bewitching hold. In the last portion of the film, Juliet is in her bed and seems in a real dream when she hears a voice calling out of the walls of her room. In spite of the appearance in her dream of her mother who tries to restrain Juliet, she rises and goes to the wall and seems to open it as if it held a secret door. Down a strange corridor she sees herself again as a child-saint on her martyr's rack. Now as a mature woman, Juliet is seen struggling to release her childhood self from her bonds. Then she is seen outside the house waving goodbye to the dumpy, little Juliet and to the grandfather who flies away in an ancient circus airplane--like that in which she had imagined him flying away with his ballerina.

Finally, in the light of morning, Juliet is seen outside her gingerbread house. Quite alone, but no longer frightened, she is free of the house's dangerous spell. The archetypal woods of bad dreams and confusion are also behind her. This Gretel has escaped her myth of herself.

In speaking of Juliet of the Spirits, Fellini gave this film's larger implications for both men and women. In a profound paradox, he said, "A free man cannot do without a free woman."[14] It appears, then, that Fellini gives woman's liberation first priority.

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[13]Kezich, p. 300 (in Cohen's transcription).

[14]Kezich, p. 62, quoting Fellini.